



League of Conservation Voters Education Fund

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Vast majority of Idaho voters consider environmental issues in making voting decision

Idaho voters rate environmental issues a top priority, and environmental actions figure strongly in voting decisions, says a new poll released today. The GarinHartYang poll of 505 likely November 2000 voters indicates a strong commitment to environmental protection by voters in all parts of the state and across party lines. The poll was taken from December 10 -13 for the League of Conservation Voters Education Fund.

“Idaho voters understand the strong connection between a healthy environment and a strong economy. Eighty percent believe we can have both. With the small portion (15%) who believe we have to choose – sixty-five percent choose the environment,” said Teresa Purcell, Northwest Regional Director for the League of Conservation Voters Education Fund.

“It is clear that Idahoans choose to live here because it is a wonderful place to work and play outdoors. When asked about a range of issues, Idahoans’ placed concerns about clean air and water above concerns about taxes. This concern crosses party lines,” said Darci Yarrington, Executive Director VOICE (Voters of Idaho for Conservation Education). “Elected officials should take note that these issues matter in how people decide to vote - it is clear that voters are deeply concerned about environmental issues, especially clean air and water,” said Yarrington.

“While Idaho voters are generally resistant to additional regulations, they are willing to take steps to preserve the wilderness that makes our state unique. By approximately a two-to-one margin (65%-32%) they favor both additional permanent protection of back-country roadless areas in Idaho’s national forests, and additional restrictions on the use of off-road motorized vehicles in undeveloped areas to protect fish, wildlife and solitude,” said Rick Johnson, Executive Director of the Idaho Conservation League.

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The level of concern about air and water quality is broad-based, as well as intense. Overall 44 % of Idaho voters rate clean air and water as an important concern, half of Democrats (50%) and Independents (50%), as well as more than one-third (37%) of Republicans. Concerns about clean air and water far exceed concerns about taxes (30%). Republicans place a slightly higher priority on clean air and water (37%) than on taxes (33%).

Given the importance of environmental issues to Idaho's voters, it is not surprising that they take these issues into consideration on Election Day. An overwhelming majority (85%) of voters say that conservation or environmental issues are important to them when making voting decisions, including more than one-third (36%) who consider them a primary factor in their decision making. The extent to which conservation issues matter to Idaho voters is impressive--they are nearly universally important to Democrats (92%) and Independents (92%), and more than three-quarters (78%) of Republicans agree.

Assessment of the state's environmental quality is not colored by partisanship, as similar proportions of Democrats (26%), Independents (28%), and Republicans (21%) feel that the situation has gotten worse.

These findings suggest that simply continuing current efforts toward protecting the environment are insufficient. This is reflected in Idahoans' attitudes towards the best way to deal with environmental laws. A large plurality (41%) of voters believe that better enforcement of the environmental laws currently on the books is necessary to best protect Idaho's environment, and there is a consensus among Democrats (44%), Independents (40%), and Republicans (40%) towards this approach. Only one-quarter (26%) of voters say enforcement of the current laws is sufficient, while 14% of voters would like to see stronger laws enacted, fourteen percent would like to see laws scaled back.

When it comes to efforts to maintain a clean environment, Idaho voters overwhelmingly agree that it is possible to do so while also sustaining a strong economy (80%). These sentiments run strong across party lines. Only a small minority (15%) of voters feel that a choice must be made between the environment and the economy, and even this handful of voters would overwhelmingly choose the environment (65%) over the economy (26%) if they had to.

Although Idaho voters are hesitant to enact stronger laws to protect the environment, they prefer a candidate with a strong record on environmental issues (47%) over one who feels there are too many government regulations and sides with business and agriculture (41%). The advantage is overwhelmingly in favor of the pro-environment candidate, however, if special interest contributions are introduced in the election match up. When voters learn that the anti-regulation candidate has taken campaign contributions from big developers and corporations that are known polluters, the consensus candidate is the one with the pro-environment record; three-quarters (74%) of voters choose this candidate, including strong majorities of Democrats (80%), Independents (75%), and Republicans (74%).

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